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Grammatical Sketch of Beng

Introduction

Section 1

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Introduction

Section 1

Denis Paperno

EDITOR'S NOTE

This article is available in russian: http://paperno.bol.ucla.edu/beng_grammar_proofs.pdf

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This work, after numerous revisions and additions, is ultimately based on a thesis defended at Moscow State University Department of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics in 2006, advised by Valentin Vydrin and Aleksandr Kibrik. An earlier version of this work appeared in Russian as (Paperno 2011).

- 1 Beng is a South Mande language of Côte d'Ivoire. The core Beng population lives in a compact area in the Prefecture of M'Bahiakro at the northern edge of the tropical forest zone in Côte d'Ivoire. Until now, descriptions of only some aspects of the structure of Beng, particularly phonology and, to some degree, morphology, have been available to the general reader. The current work makes the first attempt at a systematic description of Beng grammar, providing a typologically oriented overview of phonology, morphology, and the basic syntactic constructions of Beng. While the content of this sketch is primarily descriptive, it is intended for a broad linguistic audience, written in particular for typologically minded readers.
- 2 The research presented here is based on three field trips to Côte d'Ivoire in 2004, 2005, and 2006.¹ My main Beng consultant was Kouadio Kouadio Destin (b. 1968), and a significant part of the data comes from Kouadio Kouadio Patrice (b. 1980). Both speakers represent the variety of Ouassadougou (Beng: *Àságbě*). In some cases I also used judgments by Augustin Yao Kouakou (b. 1967) from Totodougou (Beng: *Tótógbě*).

Besides the original field data, I relied on previous scholarship on Beng, including unpublished materials (Paesler ms.), kindly provided to me by the Summer Institute of Linguistics, as well as the lexicographic notes of anthropologist Alma Gottlieb published in (Gottlieb, Murphy 1995).

- 3 The structure of this work is as follows. After a brief introduction (Section 1), I outline general information on Beng (Section 2), including basic sociolinguistic parameters and dialect divides, and then proceed to the history of the linguistic study of Beng (Section 3). Linguistic description proper begins with an outline of phonological inventory and phonological processes, both segmental and tonal (Section 4). Sections that follow deal with personal pronoun morphology (Section 5; see also (Paperno 2005)), and the morphology of other parts of speech (Section 6); the discussion of inflection and productive derivation of verbs, adjectives and location nouns is interspersed, grouped by morphological expression rather than by part of speech, as the same morphological means (an affix or reduplication) can combine with different parts of speech with similar semantic effects. Section 7 discusses empirical tests for (syntactic) parts of speech, as morphological criteria have limited applicability in Beng. I argue for distinguishing not only nouns, adjectives, postpositions, and adverbs, but also intermediate and finer classes: locative nouns, temporal nouns, locative postpositions, and pure postpositions. Section 8 describes NP (DP) structure, covering various noun modifiers: possessors, locative modifiers, appositions, adjectives, and determiners. Section 9 is dedicated to nominal number, a ‘hidden’ grammatical category, which can be expressed analytically, via verb of adjective agreement, or pronoun doubling, but almost never in the noun itself, and to the related issue of agreement in Beng; I describe two kinds of agreement marking, plural reduplication and pronoun doubling. Section 10 discusses the syntax and the semantics of locative constituents. Section 11 briefly introduces Beng equivalents of ‘or’ (à lé é n̄) and ‘and’, (nḡ ... lō, which is only applicable to certain constituent types; due to the absence of verb/VP conjunction and restrictions on converb use the expression of predicate conjunction falls upon clause compounding, in particular sentence juxtaposition and temporal clause subordination). Section 12 describes simple clause structure, including the encoding of sentential grammatical categories: tense, aspect, modality, and polarity. In the following sections I characterize clausal arguments and adjuncts, and overview the main syntactic relations (arguments): subject, direct object, secondary object, and indirect object. While Beng subjects do possess a number of salient features, some syntactic phenomena are “ergative”, uniting the direct object with the intransitive subject as opposed to transitive subject (these include control of secondary predicate, quantified NP float, and reduplicative plural agreement on the verb). Section 13 gives an overview of multiple predication in Beng, with a particular focus on temporal clause marking that is identical to information structure marking; I describe two positional classes of complementizers (such as the preposed complementizer *kē* ‘that’ and the postposed *déē* ‘if’), which turn out to be motivated by the typical linear position of the subordinate clause relative to the main clause. Section 14 discusses information structure marking: topic, contrastive topic, and focus, which are, as is typical in African languages, expressed by dedicated morphemes. Section 15 contains two sample texts in Beng, and Section 16 reproduces Beng words and phrases originally published by Louis Tauxier (1921) along with corresponding modern data.

NOTES

1. The 2004 and 2005 field trips were supported by the grant (04-04-00262a) “Languages of the world: Mande languages” of the Russian Foundation for Human Studies, and the 2006 trip by the grant SUBJ 062156.00 “Exploring an African terra incognita: Lexicology and reconstruction in South Mande languages” of the Swiss National Science Foundation.

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